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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [SU](#) [DA](#)

SUBJECT: SUDAN REACTS TO REPUBLICATION OF DANISH CARTOONS WITH MASS
RALLY, TRADE BOYCOTT

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Addressing a mass rally in Khartoum organized by government-affiliated Islamic organizations, President Bashir denounced cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed that were recently republished in Danish newspapers. An embargo on Danish trade and travel has been reported in the press, but Denmark's mission in Khartoum has not so far been notified of any such actions. End Summary.

President Bashir Addresses Demonstrators

¶2. (U) Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir on February 27 addressed a crowd reliably estimated at 15,000 to 20,000 (pro-government newspapers claimed turnout was over one million) at a peaceful mass rally in Khartoum protesting "the cartoons insulting the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) which were reprinted by Danish newspapers." The demonstration was called by the "Sudan Forum for Defending the Prophet Mohammed," an organization closely affiliated with the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Protesters gathered at Khartoum and El Neilan Universities and converged on the Presidential Palace, where leaders delivered a protest letter, and Bashir and others addressed the crowd.

¶3. (U) According to press reports, Bashir told the crowd "We urge all Muslims around the world to boycott Danish commodities, goods, companies, institutions, organizations and personalities." He added that "not a single Danish foot will from now on desecrate the land of Sudan." The crowd responded with shouts of "Down, down Denmark!" Expanding beyond the immediate issue of the Danish cartoons, Bashir added "the blood of Muslims is shed and their honor violated in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia."

Trade Embargo Announced in the Press

¶4. (SBU) In addition to the February 27 demonstration, Sudan's Government of National Unity (GNU) on February 26 announced a prohibition on Danish imports into Sudan. The Director General of Sudan's Customs Police is reported to have said that his agency is very serious about implementing the decree. However, as of February 28, the Danish mission in Khartoum had received no official notification of an embargo or any restrictions on travel by Danish citizens.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) Wednesday's march and rally were notable for their lack of spontaneity. Given the Forum's ties to the NCP and GNU, a large turnout was fully expected. (One cell phone company sent a canned text message to all of its subscribers the night before, announcing the "million man march.") The controversy over the cartoons provides Sudan's generally unpopular government with an opportunity to portray itself as the defender of a beleaguered Islamic faith, under attack by a hostile West, and to divert attention from its own behavior in Darfur and elsewhere. We have seen little indication of

independent popular outrage. Denmark's trade with Sudan is minimal, but Sudan (especially Darfur) is a significant recipient of Danish humanitarian assistance. Danish NGO's are active, and Danes work in various international organizations present in Sudan. How the GNU's announced embargo (if it is actually to be enforced) will affect their operations is not yet clear.

FERNANDEZ